

Buying Safer Products

Purchasing safer alternatives to hazardous products—or using non-chemical methods that accomplish the same goal—are the best ways to make life safer for you and your family. An example, of a non-chemical alternative for clearing drains is a drain snake. Reducing use of hazardous products will also improve the quality of the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat.

Chemical Product Purchasing Tips (Follow these easy steps)

- 1) **Read the label:** A quick look at several products will help you find the safest product that will do the job. This section tells you exactly what to look for.
- 2) **Buy the safest alternative:** Buy the safest product that will do the job.
- 3) **Buy chemical products only when necessary:** When considering a chemical product, ask yourself—will something else you already have do the job?
- 4) **Buy only what you need:** Avoid “super” sizes and bundled products. The few cents you might save are not worth the risk of storing unused hazardous products.
- 5) **Skip aerosol sprays:** Aerosols cause air pollution, and pose disposal issues when empty. Choose solid or gel products, or pump sprays.

Concerned about a hazardous product? Ask your grocer or hardware store to stock safer products.

Each of us must take responsibility for the impacts caused by the products we buy.



Reading Product Labels

The label should tell you what the product is for, how to use it, the hazards you can be exposed to, and what to do if you have an accident.

The most important time to read the label is before you buy a product. Many injuries and unsafe exposures can be avoided by reading the label. You are in the store looking for chemicals because you have a job to do at home. Maybe you have a drain that is backed up, or just need some window cleaner. How do you decide which of the many products on the shelf is best for you? Start by reading the labels.



What is this product for? Does it do just one job, or can I use it for several tasks? Are there any restrictions, such as “avoid using product around plastic, metal, or fabric?”

How do I use it? Is the product ready-to-use, or do I mix it with water? How can I mix the product safely? How much will I need to do the job?

How hazardous is the product? Read the product label to determine what types of hazards you face and how to protect yourself. Can the product burn your skin? Can it catch on fire? Should you use it outside? Should you wear protective gloves, goggles, or other equipment to prevent being exposed? All chemical products pose some risk, so know what you are getting into.

What do I do if I have an accident? Does the label say what to do if the product contacts skin, or is inhaled or swallowed? Does the label give you enough information to prepare for and respond to these accidents?



Common household products that are found in the kitchen, bathroom, garage, and workshed can be hazardous and must be disposed of properly.

Choose products with labels that say:

Non-Toxic - Touching, breathing, or accidentally drinking the product will not kill you (although you may get sick).

Biodegradable - Natural bacteria in the environment will convert the product into harmless chemicals.

Contains No Hazardous Ingredients - This phrase usually means that the product does not contain more than 1% of any single hazardous chemical or 0.1% of any single carcinogen.

Other phrases that may help identify safer products include:

- Free of chlorine
- Water based
- No dye or perfume
- Citrus based

Be aware that phrases like “eco-friendly,” “green,” and “environmentally preferable” can be misleading.

Choose products with label statements such as: “non-toxic;” “non-carcinogenic;” “non- petroleum-based;” “free of ammonia;” “phosphates;” “dye or perfume;” “readily biodegradable;” “non-fuming” and “recyclable container.”



If you select hazardous products over safer alternatives, you should use these products with extreme care, which means that you should wear gloves and goggles, keep children and pets away, and be sure that you have a good supply of fresh air.

Prior to each use, review the steps to follow if you have an accident, spill or exposure.

Where possible, avoid products having labels that say any of the following:

Signal Words: Look for the label signal word (**Caution, Warning, Danger or Poison**). Choose products labeled “Caution” over “Warning;” avoid products labeled “Danger” or “Poison.”

Definitions:

Poison, Danger or Highly Toxic – Swallowing 1 teaspoon or less can kill a person.

Warning or Very Toxic – Swallowing 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon can kill a person.

Caution or Toxic – Swallowing an ounce to a pint can kill a person.

Corrosive or Caustic – Contains chemicals that can blind you or burn your skin.

Flammable or Combustible – The product will burn easily, and may give off vapors that can ignite.

Explosive – The product or container could explode if mishandled.

Volatile or Contains VOCs – Contains volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) that evaporate and cause air pollution and potential health effects.

Proposition 65 (Prop. 65) – Product contains chemicals that the State of California has determined will cause cancer or reproductive harm.

Provide Adequate Ventilation – Lots of fresh air is needed to keep you from breathing harmful amounts of the product or to prevent explosion.

Contains Propane or Contents Under Pressure – These are aerosol containers, which cost taxpayers more to dispose of and have more risk than do the same products that are packaged in pump spray bottles.

Other tips that a product is toxic include:

- Harmful or fatal if swallowed
- Instructions that call for use of safety equipment
- Warnings of environmental hazards (like toxic to bees, birds, and fish)



Household products that are hazardous are required to provide specific signal words – the product labels above showcase some samples of product manufacturers use of signal words.